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Initial Transcript

IRAQ AFTER THE SURGE: WHAT NEXT?

SUBJECT: GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ; AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

LOCATION: HEARING OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE



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SUBJECT: IRAQ AFTER THE SURGE: WHAT NEXT?

CHAIRMAN BY: SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN (D-DE)

WITNESSES: GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ; AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

LOCATION: 216 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 2:37 P.M. EDT

DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2008

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That ties into regional stability, and then of course it all ties eventually into the global economy. And it is noteworthy that the progress in Iraq has enabled it to reach, in fact, recently the highest export levels ever, I believe it is, out of the north, and the levels have exceeded their export goals now for the first three months of the year -- and so, again, an area of progress due to security progress as well.

SEN. LUGAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator Dodd.

SEN. CHRISTOPHER DODD (D-CT): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome to both of you. As the chairman has said, you've got a long day and a long day tomorrow coming up, and I'm sure some of these questions will be repeated in one form or another. So we thank you for your endurance and your willingness to share with us your thoughts on all of this.

I'd like to first of all pick up on something Senator Lugar has begun. I think it is very important to making these assessments to look at the broader context, what we're dealing with. And one of the reasons I was a couple minutes late getting over here is we're in the midst of trying to deal with the housing piece of legislation. You've got some 8,000 people a day in this country that are entering into

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foreclosure on their homes, to put it -- the numbers on inflation, unemployment rates, all of these factors, which are contributing to a lot of people's concerns about generally where things are heading.

I'd like to focus, if I can, just on two quick questions -- one, I think, more specifically for you, General, to respond to, and one for the ambassador. One has to do with the condition of our troops. I think all of us here -- certainly at this dais, representing our constituency, whatever views we have on policy, there's an incredible admiration for what our men and women are doing in uniform. You both raised it. It's been raised by others. It's very important, I think, that our troops know that. Arguments over policy are one thing, but our commitment to these men and women serving know no division whatsoever.

But I was sort of surprised and stunned on some of the recent numbers. A study done by the Department of Defense found that each -- with each additional deployment, soldiers are 60 percent more likely to develop severe combat-related stress issues, while a study conducted by the surgeon general of the Army found that soldiers suffering from high levels of combat stress are twice as likely to find themselves in a situation where they are in violation of the armed forces' ethics, standards, and seven times more likely to hit an Iraqi civilian.

So I'd like to ask you, if I could, General, as someone who has really written the book on counterinsurgency -- and I say that with great admiration for your background and abilities -- what impact is this stress of repeated combat tours having on our military's ability to effectively conduct the counterinsurgency campaign? What effect should such -- could such high levels of combat stress have on soldiers who must regularly interact with and ultimately win the hearts and minds argument?

Both the Army chief of staff, General George Casey, and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, have both raised serious concerns about our armed forces' capability to react to emerging threats, going to the point Senator Lugar raised about other contingencies where our forces may be called upon.

I'll just quote for you -- which I'm sure you're aware of -- General Cody's comments at recent hearing before the Armed Services Committee, where we were this morning. And I think in relationship to the surge, talking about the surge, he said, "Right now all the units that are back at home station are training to replace (the) next units in Afghanistan and Iraq. If the surge comes down the way we predict, and we get so many troops back and brigade combat teams back, and we can get the dwell time right, we'll start getting those units trained to full-spectrum readiness for future contingencies. I don't know what those future contingencies are," he went on to say, "but I know that this nation and this joint force needs to have a division-ready brigade, an airborne brigade ready for full-spectrum operations, a heavy brigade combat team ready for full-spectrum operations, and a Stryker brigade combat team ready for full-spectrum operations, and we

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don't have that today."

He went on to say, "Right now, as I've testified -- and I've been doing this for six years -- I was at G-3 of the Army and vice chair (sic; chief) now for almost (four) years, and I've never seen our lack of strategic depth at where it is today."

Now, if we're talking about continuing our forces there, adding to the stress, in the assessments being done by the surgeon general and the Defense Department's own study, and in light of these other issues you're dealing with, obviously, on the ground in Iraq, what additional pressures are we placing on these men and women serving?

What additional pressures are we placing on ourselves and our ability to respond to other contingencies, given the pressures that have been recognized by some of your colleagues here at the Department of Defense?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, let me talk about Iraq, Senator. Obviously that's what I'm riveted on and that's what my mission is. And when I got back to Iraq in February 2007, there were two enormous changes. The first was the damage done to Iraq by ethnosectarian violence, as I mentioned, the fabric of society torn; the second, how much more our troopers understand what it is that we are trying to do in this very complex endeavor -- that is, counterinsurgency operations.

By the way, counterinsurgency operations require full-spectrum operations. They require offense, and we do a lot of it. In the past year, we did the Ramadi clearance, Baqubah, south Baghdad. Some of these were multiple -- certainly multiple battalions and beyond brigade combat team operations. These are big operations, in other words, not just hearts and minds activities. Certainly it involves force protection, some defense, and it involves stability and support operations, which a lot tend to associate with counterinsurgency once the security situation reaches that point.

Our troopers really very much understand it, and they are far better at this -- far better because of changes made in the institution, in the army -- General Cody is the vice chief of -- in the training of our troopers or education of the leaders, the collective mission rehearsal exercises, the lessons learned process and all the rest of that.

Now, there's no question but that these multiple tours have put enormous strain on the force. Absolutely. It is something, again, I am personally very keenly aware of.

Paradoxically, reenlistment rates seem to be quite high. Again, I track the units in Iraq, and one of the divisions that is there, on its third tour, in fact, getting ready to come home, is a unit that -- the division commander reported the other day that met their reenlistment goal for the entire fiscal year at this point right now, obviously about halfway into it. So again, while the troopers very much feel the strain, while I would personally welcome -- I look

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forward to the opportunity for the army and so forth to come back to 12-month tours vice 15(-month) ones, which are particularly difficult, the troopers that we see in Iraq are doing a magnificent job.

They also happen to be the best equipped force. They are vastly better equipped than we were when I was a division commander and we went through the berm, flew over the berm in the fight to Baghdad. And I can give you case after case after case of equipment that places our forces in an absolutely unique position in the world now. And we monitor this. When we saw another country starting to do some operations recently in that area and recognized the vast differences between our situational awareness; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets; the satellite communications; the fusion of conventional Special Forces and special mission units, and all the rest of that, it is vastly better than we were in the beginning. And again, our troopers do an extraordinarily good job despite the enormous strain that clearly they and their families have experienced over the course of the last number of years.

SEN. DODD: While I thank you for that answer, I'm still deeply concerned about these reports on stress levels and so forth that are mounting up and --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Sir, I share that, again, as I stated, and that is a factor in my recommendations.

And again I have, you know, personal experience with --

SEN. DODD: No. I know you do.

I didn't get to the question, Ambassador Crocker, just about these militias. Again the good news is this Awakening and dealing with -- the Sunni militias dealing with al Qaeda is the good news. It's not a long-term strategy and exactly the point, I think, Senator Biden was driving at.

And since here we're arming and engaging these militias and, at the same time, strengthening or calling for a strengthened central government to respond to all of this, how you turn that around, it seems to me, when you're counting on these militias, and then plan to integrate them, is going to raise some huge issues --

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, let me take that one, if I could, because there's a few misconceptions.

We don't arm any of these Sons of Iraq. They are tribal members to begin with. Every Iraqi is allowed an AK-47 in his own house by law. And they are more than heavily enough armed. What we have done is we stood by them initially when the first tribe came forward in October 2006 before the surge.

But then subsequent to that, as the chain reaction took place in Ramadi and went up and down the Euphrates River Valley in the early spring and then summer of 2007, enabled by the additional forces out

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in Anbar, then in Baghdad, South Baghdad, Diyala and so forth, these individuals have decided to reject the extremist ideology of al Qaeda, their oppressive practices and the indiscriminate violence that they visited on all communities in Iraq, not just Shi'a but Sunni Arab communities as well.

And that's a hugely significant shift. It's a seismic shift in the Sunni Arab world and one that we hope to see extend even farther.

(Cross talk.)

SEN. DODD: But we're paying them, of course.

AMB. CROCKER: We -- well, sir, they started out volunteering and they did volunteer for a long time. And we said, you know, we did the math. And the math is \$16 million a month that we pay them with CERP.

And now, as I mentioned, the Iraqis are giving \$300 million in CERP. Or how many tens of millions of loss of vehicles or loss of priceless lives, and I think that was the best investment that we've made in Iraq.

And now we are transitioning them. As I mentioned, over 21,000 transitioned to Iraqi security forces or other positions. And slowly but surely, not easily -- nothing in Iraq is easy.

SEN. DODD: Thank you.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator Hagel.

SEN. CHUCK HAGEL (R-NE): Mr. Chairman, thank you.

And gentlemen, welcome. I want to go back, just very briefly as I open my questions, to a point that Chairman Biden noted at the beginning. And that is, we all recognize that the two of you and who you represent are implementers of policy. You don't set policy. You can help influence it, shape it, mold it.

But I know from my brief military experience, General, when the commander tells you to take the hill, you take the hill or you sure as hell try. And we have the best force structure in the world to do that. And I think we all acknowledge that.

And my point in opening with that comment is to make certain that you understand as well as all of your colleagues that this is not a session today to pick on you, to pick on any of you or certainly not acknowledge the kind of sacrifices that you both acknowledged here today. And we respect that and we appreciate it.

But I have always believed in one dynamic of this business. And that is if we are to be held accountable, elected officials, for any one thing, it is that we should be held accountable to developing and setting policy worthy of the sacrifices of our men and women that we ask to implement policy.

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So I wanted to put that on the table before I ask a couple of questions.

As we sit here today -- and the two of you are acutely aware of this -- your headquarters in the International Zone, the Green Zone, last few days has continually been rocketed, mortared. We took casualties there, the other day, as you know, of course -- a number of Americans killed and wounded.

And there's, it seems to me, some disconnect in the abstraction that we're dealing with today as you both have presented not a glowing report, but I think a fair report, what you see as not just progress made but where we're going and what this is about. But the reality is, since the president announced the surge last January, we have lost over 1,000 dead Americans -- January of 2007. And I know you're painfully aware of that, General. We lost certain elements of our units as well in the wounded -- over 6,300 wounded -- and all the other dynamics that have been alluded to.

And the reason I bring that up is because I think those are the realities that we're talking about here. And I want to move to one particular area that you have both covered in your testimony, and that is where do we go from here, whether it's the pause and then you will assess or whether it's what Ambassador Crocker noted, that I will get to specifically, the regional and international dynamics -- as you have said, a diplomatic surge.

But the fact is also, and I think anyone who takes an honest evaluation of this -- and certainly we've seen the U.S. Institute of Peace's report, the part II of the Iraqi Study Group Report, your former colleagues, General, who were up here last week and others who have been involved with Iraq and military and foreign affairs for some time. The fact is, regardless of whether we're in or whether we're out or whether -- when we leave, or the time frame when we leave, because we are going to unwind and we are going to leave at some point, if for no other reason than what my colleagues have noted here, because we don't have the capacity to sustain it -- if for no other reason. And just as you said, Ambassador Crocker, it's a matter of how we leave and what we leave as best we can, but we're dealing with uncontrollables well out of the capacity for the world's finest military to deal with.

And I would just want to remind you, General, of something that you said in March last year. And I think it's something we should keep our eye on. You noted, this is your quote, "There is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq -- to the insurgency of Iraq." And then you went on to say, "A political resolution is what will determine, in the long run, the success of that effort."

When you were both here in September, you both noted that, that the surge was to buy time, essentially, for some political reconciliation or at least some accommodation. And then a couple of weeks ago, General Petraeus, you gave an interview which was in The

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Washington Post and you noted, quote, "No one in the U.S. or Iraqi government feels that there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation."

Now, if we all generally agree that the sacrifices that we're making are all about the underpinning dynamic that in the end is all that's going to count -- certainly security is important, we understand that, but how we arrive or the Iraqis arrive at some political accommodation to sort all this out -- then that should be our focus. And the fact is, by any analysis, we're going to continue to see a bloody Iraq. We are going to continue to see, as you have both noted in your testimony, an Iraq that will ricochet from crisis to crisis. And I am wondering as I listen to both of you carefully, if we are not essentially holding our policy captive to Iraqi developments.

Certainly conditions, as you've noted, General, dictate tactics. But I'm not sure that conditional response should dictate policy.

And with that, I want to launch into Ambassador Crocker's testimony when you talk about a diplomatic surge. Now, a diplomatic surge, I assume, is somewhat similar to the surge we saw militarily, meaning that you put tens of thousands of more troops on the ground and you did the things you thought you needed to do to surge. But as I read the testimony, Ambassador, it's pretty thin.

I don't know if I would equate surge with Turkey hosted the second ministerial meeting of Iraq's neighbors in November, last November, and Kuwait will now host the third meeting later this month. I don't know if that's a surge.

Support from Arab capitals has been strong -- has not been strong. I don't know how we think we would find any regional diplomatic effort that's going to work if we can't get the regional neighbors to work with us.

Syria plays an ambivalent role. Iran continues to undermine the efforts of the Iraqi government.

So, where's the surge? What are we doing? I don't see Secretary Rice doing any Kissinger-esque flying around. Where is the diplomatic surge, in my opinion the one core issue that in the end is going to make the difference as to the outcome of Iraq and will certainly have an awful lot to do with how we come out of this? So, where is the surge? What are you talking about?

AMB. CROCKER: The neighbors process is predicated on biannual ministerial meetings. So in November in Istanbul, April, a little bit ahead of six months in Kuwait, that's the schedule we run to. The first ministerial was last May in Sharm el-Sheikh. In between the ministerials, there are meetings of working groups on energy, border security and refugees. The border security, the energy and refugee working groups have met over the course of the last month. Border security will meet, I think, in this coming week. So there is

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activity.

Does there need to be more activity on the part of the region? Clearly, yes. And I noted in my statement the Arabs need to be more engaged. We have pressed them on that. I have made a swing through the region. Of course, the president and the vice president were both on regional tours in the first part of this year. Ultimately, again, the Arabs are going to have to make their own decisions, but they also need to understand that this is important to their interests; it's not a favor to us or to Iraq. So that is a message we continue to press them on.

Similarly with Iran. As I noted in my statement, we have taken a position that we are prepared to discuss face-to-face with the Iranians security in Iraq at Iraqi request. The Iraqis have announced that they would like to see another meeting occur. We have said we're ready to participate. It's now up to the Iranians.

Again, we can't compel the neighbors to behave constructively and positively, but we can certainly send the message that it's in their interest to do so.

SEN. HAGEL: My time is up, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. Thank you.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator Kerry.

SEN. JOHN KERRY (D-MA): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Crocker, General Petraeus, welcome. We're delighted to have you here, and we thank you both for what you are doing on behalf of the country.

General Petraeus, I particularly want to thank you and acknowledge, as I don't think you've heard enough from all sides of the aisle in this country, that we really do respect and understand that you have achieved some measure of a kind of progress. And it's a progress that is within your purview, as the commander of armed forces and on the military field, to be able to achieve. And you've done about as good a job of playing a tough hand as somebody could do.

And so through you to all those who've engaged in that, to our troops, we want them to understand the degree to which we respect and recognize that accomplishment.

The problem is, for all of us, that there's a larger set of balancing here that we have to do, and I think you know that. You've repeatedly said how you're limited to Iraq. We're not. We're looking at how we defend the larger interests of our country and protect it and do a better job of fighting the war on terror. And so I look at this larger field, I see a fundamental equation with respect to Iraq that essentially stays the same, notwithstanding the progress we've made.

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There is a fundamental struggle, sectarian power struggle taking place over which we do not have a lot of control. In fact, the Iranians have an increasing amount, partly because of our presence. There is a dysfunctional government, stumbling here and there, occasionally trying to stand up, but fundamentally, most people would agree, unable to deliver a lot of services, a great difficulty to be able to reconcile. The oil law, the constitutional changes, the real fundamentals that go to the core of the sectarian division.

There is a decreasing ability, as Senator Dodd has pointed to and General Odom last week before our committee, General McCaffrey, General Scales, others, have all pointed to the decreasing ability of our military to sustain this over a long period of time. That is a message that not only we have heard, but believe me, our opponents have heard it. Everybody in the world has heard it, including our troops, who live it with repeated deployments and stop loss and so forth.

So the issue here is, you know, how do we see our way to conclude this, successfully? Now, in that regard, you know, there's been a lot of misinterpretation and some sloganeering and a lot of exploitation, because I don't know anybody on our side who is suggesting you create chaos, just pull a plug, avoid responsibility. That is not the suggestion. The suggestion is that we change the dynamics, which require something more of the Iraqis themselves. Your quote that Senator Hagel just pointed to, the one where you say -- I think on March 14th, "No one feels there has been sufficient progress by any means in the area of national reconciliation." Is that an accurate quote? No?

GEN. PETRAEUS: It is, Senator, but thanks for the opportunity to note that I then laid out a number of areas in which there has been progress.

SEN. KERRY: I agree, and you laid them out to this committee already.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes, sir.

SEN. KERRY: And I have limited time, so I don't want to go through them all again now, but we acknowledged them. You have laid them out. Now, I've acknowledged them too. There is progress in those areas.

GEN. PETRAEUS: What I was conveying was the impatience, candidly, that actually all of us feel, and including the Iraqis.

SEN. KERRY: Well, the -- you said this morning to the Armed Services Committee that war is not a linear phenomenon, that you can't predict certain things.

Now, that is true if war were, in fact, the determinant of what is going to happen in Iraq. But you yourself have said the war is not the determinant. There is no military solution, to quote you. The

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solution is the political side of the fence, where you have now also acknowledged there is not sufficient progress.

So my question to you is, do you ask yourself? I've had the Sunni chiefs who are part of the Awakening. We have basically rented their allegiance. You've acknowledged the money we're paying them. There is a time when that allegiance may shift.

They are not being integrated into the Shi'a forces, into the ISF forces. So that lack of integration is viewed by the Shi'a as perhaps arming, however it comes, whether they arm themselves -- they're being paid by us; they're viewed as being an increasing force. And the fundamental struggle of Iraq remains the same.

So the question I ask is, has it struck you? As those chieftains I met with acknowledged to me, they said, yes, we don't have to make a decision as long as we know you guys are here.

Has it struck you, as I know it did perhaps your predecessor a little bit, that this open-endedness, this commitment of large forces without a sense of what the process will be, without specific deadlines and times, actually empowers them to avoid making the decisions and the reconciliation they have to make?

AMB. CROCKER: It's an important question, Senator, and it's something I have thought about. Are there alternatives that give you as good or better outcomes? And I'm familiar with the argumentation on that one.

What I have seen during my little more than a year in Iraq now is that when we do see movement forward, when we do see a spirit of compromise, something other than a zero-sum mentality, it's when leaders and the communities behind them are feeling relatively secure, secure enough to make tradeoffs, which is --

SEN. KERRY: But we gave them security with 160,000 troops and we didn't achieve the political progress we needed. How do you achieve it with less troops, facing the drawdown realities of sustainability of our force?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Senator, what we are doing in fact is helping achieve local, bottom-up reconciliation. And in fact, by the way,

they are being integrated into the ISF, in fact, as a number of the Sons of Iraq in Anbar province, others in Baghdad have been integrated into the police. Some of those fighting in Basra actually are from the 1st Iraqi Army Division, which has a substantial Sunni complement in it.

I do weigh this issue all the time. But what we are seeing at local level actually in Anbar --

SEN. KERRY: Sunni complement: But it's a Sunni complement that

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operates as a Sunni complement.

GEN. PETRAEUS: No. No, sir. It's part of --

SEN. KERRY: It's integrated. It's fully integrated.

GEN. PETRAEUS: It's part of an integrated Iraqi army, yes, sir.

In fact, the first commander of the 1st Division, I think, was Shi'a. And the second commander is actually Sunni.

SEN. KERRY: How many are there?

GEN. PETRAEUS: There are 13 divisions now, sir.

SEN. KERRY: That are integrated?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, there are varying levels. And again, depending on where they were raised. But the Iraqi army is an integrated force. Again, some of it is less integrated than others, again depending on where it was recruited and trained, but certainly those in the midsection, and that's where the Iraqi 1st Division, as an example, is from. In Anbar province, what we are doing is precisely this. There's a substantial reduction going on there from 14 battalions down to about six, and it is because they're not just paying off the Sons of Iraq, they're actually being integrated into the provincial structure. There's all kinds of political to-ing and fro-ing. Some of that isn't pretty at times. It hasn't been overly violent, though. And gradually they're also engaging with Prime Minister Maliki. Sheikh Ahmed, the head of the Awakening in Anbar province, has gotten more money out of Prime Minister Maliki than the provincial governor.

SEN. KERRY: But isn't there a contradiction, in a sense, in your overall statement of the strategic imperative? Because you've kept mentioning al Qaeda here today. Al Qaeda -- AQI, as we know it today -- first of all didn't exist in Iraq till we got there. The Shi'a have not been deeply interrupted by AQI. The Kurds --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, sir, they were. They were blown up right and left by AQI. That was the height of the sectarian violence.

SEN. KERRY: I understand that. I absolutely understand that. But it is not a fundamental, pervasive -- I mean, most people that I've talked to, Shi'a, and most of the evidence of what's happened in the Anbar province with the Sunni is that once they decided to turn on al Qaeda and not give them a welcome, they have been able to turn around their own security --

GEN. PETRAEUS: And we helped them, sir.

SEN. KERRY: (Inaudible.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: And we cleared Ramadi, we cleared Fallujah, we

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cleared the belts of Baghdad --

SEN. KERRY: And every plan I've seen --

GEN. PETRAEUS: -- (inaudible) -- Baqubah and everything else.

SEN. KERRY: Every plan I've seen here in Congress that contemplates a drawdown contemplates leaving enough American forces there to aid in the prosecution of al Qaeda and to continue that kind of effort.

GEN. PETRAEUS: That's exactly right, yes, sir.

SEN. KERRY: But then why doesn't that change the political dynamics that demand more reconciliation, more compromise, accommodation, so we resolve the political stalemate which is at the core of the dilemma?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Sure. No, that's -- sir, that's a great question. One of the key aspects is that they are not represented right now. And that's why provincial elections scheduled for no later than October are so important. The Anbar sheikhs, for example, will tell you "We want these elections," Senator, as they, I'm sure, did, because they didn't vote in January 2005. Huge mistake.

SEN. KERRY: (Inaudible.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: And they know it. They'll do much better this time than they did before. More important, even in Nineveh province, where because they didn't vote you have a different ethnic group, actually, that largely is the head of the provincial council. So again, all of those.

SEN. KERRY: (Inaudible.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yes, sir. Thank you.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you.

Senator Coleman.

SEN. NORM COLEMAN (R-MN): Thank you. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I want to continue the discussion about this bottom-up approach. Ambassador, that's something you've talked about a lot, that when we weren't seeing the success, before we got de-Ba'athification, before we got the central government doing a budget, a range of things, you talked about the bottom-up level. There's a piece in The New York Times today, David Brooks, in which he quotes Philip Carl Salzman. He's talking about in Middle Eastern societies, "Order is achieved not by top-down imposition of abstract law. Instead, order is achieved through fluid balance of power agreements between local groups." I take it that's a fair assessment of some of the things that we've been seeing in Iraq today. Would that be a fair assessment?

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AMB. CROCKER: Senator, actually, I think it's more complex than that. That is true at one level, but there also has to be a vertical integration, if you will.

SEN. COLEMAN: And my question, I guess, the conclusion of this piece is, you know, this -- if you're going to follow this, you're going to establish order that way, it would mean the drawing down U.S. troops at a slow pace, continuing the local reconstruction efforts, supporting local elections, reaching informal agreement with Iran and (Saudis to reduce outside influence ?), then Iraq can kind of be held together.

But my question, is it -- it is about the vertical piece. And I think there is something else missing. And I'm a little frustrated as -- what can we do? Where is the pressure that we can put on Maliki to do those things that we're still a little frustrated that aren't done? Where is the -- it's -- we can't have unconditional support, here. There's got to be conditions. What are some of those conditions that are not in place today that can help us accelerate at least the vertical piece to support the horizontal piece that is taking place?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, if I could approach it from this direction of picking up on some of Senator Kerry's comments, too, because there is a synergy here. As Sunnis turned against al Qaeda in Anbar, then in Baghdad and other places, the Shi'a took note of that. They were less threatened by al Qaeda, obviously. And as General Petraeus notes, al Qaeda did enormous damage to Shi'a civilians. As that diminished, the Shi'a began to relax a little.

And that meant two things: First, there was no longer the need to rely on groups like Jaish al-Mahdi for security. And you then saw the reaction in August in Karbala when Jaish al-Mahdi elements tried to take over one of the shrines -- popular outrage against them, and that led Muqtada Sadr to declare a cease-fire. The Sunnis take note of that.

So you see a lot of positive developments bottoms-up, as it were, but that then begins to inform the national level. And that's what gives you the climate in which some of the legislative compromises that we just couldn't get in the summer and the fall were then achievable in January -- in December, January, February. You take it another step.

You mentioned Prime Minister Maliki. I think his decision to go after extremist Shi'a militias in Basra again was a product in part of

a much better cross-sectarian climate than existed heretofore. He could go after extremist Shi'a groups. How well he did it is something General Petraeus can address, but on the political side we saw then further reaction from the leadership, including the Sunni leadership. And right now -- I can't say how it's going to develop, but right now there is probably broader support from the entire leadership for the prime minister and for getting on with the business

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of the state including reconciliation than I've seen at any time since I got there.

SEN. COLEMAN: Let me take -- I'll give an optimistic scenario. We've had a number of worst-case scenarios. But perhaps getting to the same question, General, what you've done with the surge has been I think certainly way beyond even my expectations. And I had some concerns early on.

But I think it sets the stage for what the ambassador's talking about. The two go hand in hand.

But at a certain point in time, there's going to be a new administration coming in. You're going to be part of a transition, and they're going to ask the question, with the success that we've had militarily, with the movement that we've seen both horizontally, from the ground up as well as some vertically, all -- I think these pieces fit together. That is complex. What's, then, the best case scenario to say that we've reached that -- Ambassador, your words, that stable, secure, multiethnic, multisectarian democracy that has to the ability to defend itself against enemies both internal and external. Assuming we're moving in that direction, what's then the best case scenario to say now we can set a timetable and tell the American public that when we step out not in failure, but in achieving success?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, Senator, as I've explained again from a military perspective, as you would imagine as a commander on the ground and the commanders under me -- given the enormous effort it's taken to achieve this progress, it has to do with conditions, again. And what we want to do is to look at conditions and determine where it is that we can make reductions without taking undue risks.

This is really about risk, by the way. It's also a risk well beyond Iraq. It's, where do you take risk? Do you take it in Iraq? Do you take it in the region, do you take it elsewhere, and I fully understand the role of this body and the folks up at chain of command from me in determining, where do they take the risk? And at the end of the day, as Senator Hagel said, you salute and try to take the Hill with what you're given.

But what you have to do is lay out if this is the mission that you want us to perform. These are the objectives, and you have to have that dialogue very, very clearly, then this is what we believe the resources will be. To accomplish that, here's what we might be able to project again for you, just -- again, hypothetically at that point to lay out what the requirements will be, and then it is up, of course, to policymakers to determine again, where do they want to take that risk, based on, again, the various consequences in various locations.

SEN. COLEMAN: I only have time for one more question. Perhaps this is one that you can't answer. The -- you mentioned -- you talked

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about Qods Force. Iran is funding, is supporting the killing efforts that result in the killing of coalition soldiers. In other times, that would be an act of war. What is it that we need to be doing that we're not doing to make it very clear that that kind of action is -- simply can't be tolerated?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, Senator, again, my job is in Iraq. What we have done in Iraq is attempted to interdict the flowing of what are called lethal accelerants, really, this -- these trained and equipped individuals and the weapons that have been provided to them and the funding provided to them by the Iranian Qods Force.

And then of course, at the next level up, there has to be a regional approach, eventually a global approach. But that obviously has to be taken up by folks above me in the chain of command.

But again obviously it's my job to raise what's going on, to lay out. And we've detained these individuals. We have detained Qods Force officers in Iraq, as I mentioned. We've detained the deputy head of Lebanese Hezbollah 2800.

So again there's no secret about this. And as the ambassador and I have mentioned, their involvement came out in much higher relief during this latest violence.

SEN. COLEMAN: I thank both you gentlemen, and those who serve under you, for your extraordinary service.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Thank you, Senator.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much.

Senator Feingold.

SEN. RUSSELL FEINGOLD (D-WI): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for coming again to testify here today. While we may not always see eye to eye on the current situation in Iraq or the way forward, I have great respect for your service to our country and for the difficult work that you're undertaking.

And I hope you won't, and you should not, take it personally when I say that I wish we were also hearing today from those who look at Iraq from a broader perspective. The participation at this hearing of those charged with regional and global responsibilities would have helped us answer the most important question we face, which is not whether we are winning or losing in Iraq, but are we winning or losing in the global fight against al Qaeda?

Right now Iraq is hurting our national security. It is the cause celebre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world, as the intelligence community has so clearly stated. That is why we need to redeploy our troops.

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If we do, Iran as well as Turkey and Syria and other regional actors will have to decide if Iraqi instability is really in their interest once we are no longer on the hook. Iraqi factions will have a new incentive to come to the negotiating table to create a viable power-sharing agreement. Finally and perhaps most importantly we will be able to adequately address what must be our top priority: the threat posed by al Qaeda around the globe and particularly its safe haven in Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

In that regard again according to the intelligence community, al Qaeda has regenerated the core operational capabilities needed to conduct attacks inside the United States. And terrorists who would conduct those attacks, including an influx of Westerners, are being trained in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has testified that, quote, "The most likely near-term attack on the United States will come from al Qaeda," unquote, via its safe haven in Pakistan.

So General, you were just talking about, where do you take the risk? You repeated it several times. Where do you take the risk?

General and Ambassador, do you agree with me that our top national security priority should be addressing the threat posed by al Qaeda?

(Cross talk.)

AMB. CROCKER: Clearly al Qaeda is our strategic threat. I, we, of course have to look at this from the Iraq perspective. That's where our jobs are. That's what our mission is.

With respect to al Qaeda, that's why I think what the surge has achieved over this past year has been so important. Because al Qaeda, in Anbar and Baghdad as well as the North, was well on its way to having the kind of base or safe haven in which it would be sufficiently unthreatened that it could do strategic planning from Iraq against us here.

SEN. FEINGOLD: Well, let me ask the general too, and you've answered my question. General, do you think al Qaeda is our top threat?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I do, Senator. And I think it's very important to remember what Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden have repeatedly stated both publicly and privately, and that is that the central front of their global war of terror is in Iraq. And it is actually hugely important not only that we have made the gains against al Qaeda in Iraq but that Sunni Arabs have come to reject al Qaeda in Iraq, and that --

SEN. FEINGOLD: But General, al Qaeda's safe haven is in Pakistan, not Iraq. Iraq --

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GEN. PETRAEUS: There is certainly a safe haven in Pakistan as well. The safe havens they had in Iraq are very much under threat, certainly, by our effort --

SEN. FEINGOLD: You would agree that the greatest safe haven at this point and their greater operability is in Pakistan and Afghanistan, rather than Iraq. Correct?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I believe that's so. Again, you -- I'd go with the intelligence analysts, because my focus is in Iraq.

SEN. FEINGOLD: All right, but if Iraq is --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm obviously aware that there is in the FATA area a safe haven for al Qaeda, and that's where al Qaeda's senior leadership issues its directives to folks like al Qaeda-Iraq.

SEN. FEINGOLD: Well, if Iraq is really the key, why has our current approach to counterterrorism in Iraq been accompanied by an increased threat from al Qaeda around the world? Why does our intelligence community say things are actually worse than they were before?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Again, I -- Senator, I'm talking about al Qaeda in Iraq. I can't speak --

SEN. FEINGOLD: Well, I'm talking about that too. I'm asking about given the fact that you say the key is to deal with them in Iraq --

GEN. PETRAEUS: No, sir, I said that --

SEN. FEINGOLD: -- why is it that -- as we're dealing with them in Iraq, has the threat internationally increased from al Qaeda, rather than decreased?

GEN. PETRAEUS: What I said, Senator, was that al Qaeda views its central front in its global war on terror as being in Iraq -- in other words, in a sense, their main effort. I can't speak to what they have been doing in the FATA or how they have been growing there. Again, that's obviously not my area of operations.

SEN. FEINGOLD: Well, it's interesting, because al Qaeda said several things. In fact, Osama bin Laden gave quite the speech in 2004, which I think bears reading. He says that his goal is to destroy the United States by bankrupting the United States. I would suggest what he's doing to us, if that in Iraq is really his goal, is to suck our economic and military capacity, and that for us to somehow believe that staying in Iraq is not playing into his hands, I think, is a mistake.

General, you have stated that Iran is backing militias that are targeting U.S. forces. According to the Congressional Research

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Service, Iran also backs Maliki's political party as well as the Supreme -- Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Badr Brigade. Isn't it true that the Iraqi security forces we are arming, training and fighting alongside continue to be infiltrated by militias, including the Iranian-backed Badr Brigade?

GEN. PETRAEUS: First of all, it is no secret that Iran has supported all Shi'a movements to varying degrees in Iraq. The Supreme Council is a -- and the Badr Corps were elements in Iraq.

By the CPA law that was adopted by policy, there is an integration of militias into the Iraqi security forces. And when they don't serve in the interests of the Iraqi security forces, then they are discharged. And in fact, that's what's happened with some militia members and with some others. So there has been an integration of several different militias over time by, again, CPA law that was passed back in 2004.

But backing, in a sense, politically, perhaps with money -- undoubtedly with money, and providing training, arming, equipping and direction of individuals, in particular the special groups, is a very different matter.

SEN. FEINGOLD: Ambassador, following what Senator Kerry was talking about, wouldn't you agree that part of the political stalemate in Iraq is the result of disagreement among Iraqi leaders about our military presence there?

AMB. CROCKER: Actually, I don't think that is a significant element. As we've consulted with Iraq's leaders -- we saw this in August in a leadership communique there -- the five principal leaders, again, Sunni, Shi'a and Kurd, all stress the importance of a long-term relationship with the United States, including security. The only major element of the Iraqi political constellation that is on record as opposing U.S. force presence is the Sadr trend. Just about everybody else understands that our presence there is extremely important to security and stability at this juncture.

SEN. FEINGOLD: Well, I see that my time's up, but let me just add the fact that the majority of Iraqi parliamentarians have called for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal. That's a pretty significant group. And Prime Minister Maliki was apparently so concerned that the parliament would not agree to a renewal of the U.N. mandate that he basically did an end -- run around them and signed it without their consent, which I think may well have been a violation of Iraqi law. But, Mr. Chairman, I see my time is up.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator Corker.

SEN. BOB CORKER (R-TN): Mr. Chairman, thank you.

And to the two of you, I want to thank you very much for your service and your patience with all of us today and certainly have deep respect for what you both do and what our men and women in uniform are

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doing in Iraq. And again, thank you both for your testimony.

I've noticed in today's questions that whereas in the past we might have talked about some of the smaller issues, if you will, that relate to Iraq, and some of the things that are happening in a sectarian way I think most of the questioning today is focused on the bigger picture. The surge has been successful from the standpoint of creating greater security and yet I think people want a sense of what the end is going to look like. And I know that you share that same frustration.

And this morning in the -- with Mr. Hadley and General Lute, talking a little bit with them about historically how we find ourselves in a unique place where our military is performing exceptionally well and doing the things -- everything that they've been asked to do and more, and yet we're dependent upon a government that we have really no control over to perform equally well for us to really be victorious -- I don't even know if I want to use that word, but to be successful.

And so it's a very frustrating situation. I know we've described what our end game is at the big picture. We describe the country. But General Petraeus, I wonder for us, if you could, if you could articulate from the military standpoint what you see the end to be.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, what we want to do, and it will be done by local areas, not by a national light switch, Senator, is to continue the hand-off of security responsibilities to Iraqi officials and Iraqi forces, province by province, in some cases district by district, enabling us to draw down, enabling us to move more to an overwatch instead of a lead, a process that has been very much under way.

It's important to note, in fact, that in the recent flare-up of violence during the Basra operations, that in most of the other southern provinces, Iraqi security forces performed well. That was the case in Karbala, in Babil province, and Najaf was not really tested, but Qadisiyah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and, to a degree, Wasat. So really all of the other southern provinces, again, forces did -- generally did well. In some cases we did provide overwatch or backup or some kind of assistance, but they were the ones carrying the ball.

That's what we want to extend farther, in other provinces. As I mentioned, there are two additional provinces identified for provincial Iraqi control. And that process continues, trying to keep the pressure, certainly on al Qaeda Iraq, on their Sunni insurgent allies, and over time continue to reduce our footprint, our mission profile, and increase that of the Iraqi security forces over time.

That means that we will -- will stay heavily involved over time, I would think, with the transition team effort, with the adviser effort, certainly with our special operations forces and with a conventional base that is sufficient to support these other efforts, but again, gradually coming down in terms of enablers, in terms of our brigade combat teams and so forth.

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SEN. CORKER: (As we've drawn ?) down, certain significant things have occurred, as has been mentioned, from the standpoint of benchmarks. And I don't know how the two of you go about the leveraging, if any takes place -- I hope it does -- of the existing government. But can you state to us any sense of how the drawdown has affected leverage, if you will, with the Maliki government and/or others, and whether a pause in that drawdown -- what effect that may or may not have in regards to the same?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, there's a dual-edged sword there, Senator. Again, the recognition that we are drawing down obviously does put pressure on them, there's no question about that. And what we want to is put enough pressure on them to generate productive activity but not so much pressure that they go into their corners, hang on to what they have got and posture themselves to take on each other once we have -- no longer have the capacity to keep everybody making way together.

There are other methods, obviously, of leverage. Obviously, you know, they do request our support, our advice, everything from passes for the Green Zone to even occasionally showing that we have emotions other than endless patience. And we do try to employ every single tool at our disposal. Sometimes that has worked, sometimes, frankly, it has not. But certainly the progress in January and February -- a result of their efforts, again, recognizing certainly the imperative of achieving that progress to measure.

AMB. CROCKER: It's an important point. The dynamic in Iraq is such that the Iraqis -- the Maliki government and others want to be in charge of their own country. You know, I don't think any nation wants to have to rely on outside forces for their internal security. So I think they very much feel the imperative to make this kind of progress on their own. And again, that's part of the interpretation I lend to the prime minister's decision to go down to Basra, to demonstrate that Iraqi forces under his leadership are capable of taking independent action. So I think that's an important step and an important indication of Iraqi willingness -- and we'll leave the ability thing aside -- but of willingness and intention to increasingly be directing their own affairs.

So it's not so much that we've got to constantly press them to do things so that we don't have to, it's more kind of guiding and channeling and helping them see over the short-term horizon as to how deals can be dealt, and it's a constant, complex process. But the intention, I think, very much on the part of the national leadership is to take the steps that increasingly will allow them to be in charge of their own destiny.

SEN. CORKER: So, if I could summarize that, and I appreciate the statement, in essence, there are those who argue strongly for a withdrawal, causing the Iraqis to act more responsibly or to take on more responsibility. You, in essence, are arguing the same thing, that in essence as we draw down, it does put more pressure on them to act responsibly. But at the same time, that needs to be done in a

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measured way so that it's not done in a way that creates chaos, that causes them to then begin looking at self-protection, but not in a way that's steady. And that, in essence, is what you're taking a look at here for 45 days once this draw down gets to a certain point.

GEN. PETRAEUS: That's exactly right, Senator.

Again it's important to remember that we will be withdrawing, or we will have withdrawn by July, over one-quarter of our ground combat forces -- 5 of 20 brigade combat teams plus the Marine Expeditionary Unit and two Marine battalions. That is a very substantial reduction in a relatively short period of time, in about six-or-seven-month period.

And again it was the secretary of Defense actually that coined this concept or the phrase, if you will, of a period of consolidation, really assessing where we need to adjust our forces physically on the ground, and evaluation that then can be the basis for the assessments that allow us to make further recommendations for a reduction in forces, and determining where that should be.

SEN. CORKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank both of you.

SEN. BIDEN: Senator Boxer.

SEN. BARBARA BOXER (D-CA): General, help me with some of the numbers here. We've trained over 400,000 Iraqi security forces, is my understanding. And we, after we reduce, we'll be down to about 140,000.

Is that correct?

GEN. PETRAEUS: That is correct. A little under that, Senator.

SEN. BOXER: Okay, so 400,000 plus 140,000. My understanding is there's 6,000 al Qaeda.

How many insurgents are there?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I would actually assess that there are fewer al Qaeda Iraq.

(Cross talk.)

SEN. BOXER: Fewer, okay.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Again we typically say a couple of thousand. Again we can provide a classified laydown for you.

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SEN. BOXER: Okay. Well, let's say a few thousand al Qaeda.

How many insurgents?

GEN. PETRAEUS: And then there are other additional thousands of Sunni insurgent extremists as well.

SEN. BOXER: So I think, just saying to my colleagues, we've done a lot for the Iraqis in terms of just the numbers themselves: pretty overwhelmingly folks on the Iraqi side.

Now, I'll tell you what concerns me and a lot of my constituents. You have said, both of you, that the gains in Iraq -- you've said this many times before today -- are fragile and reversible. You've used those terms. Those are terms of art, and I appreciate it. They're important words.

So my constituents and I believe that after five years of unbelievable bloodshed on all sides, 4,024 dead -- I remember, it seemed like yesterday, it was 4,024 -- 30,000-plus wounded, nearly 600 billion spent, you have to wonder why the best you can say is the gains are fragile and reversible.

Now, I think most of us agree, who have not particularly supported this endeavor, that the reason is -- that's the best you can say -- is that there's been no political solution. And I listened carefully to Senator Hagel.

And Ambassador Crocker, from your answer to him, I don't get the sense that you've been given instructions from our commander in chief to change the dynamics. I find your testimony very status quo. And the status quo has been an absolute disaster, and I just don't see anything changing. I don't see us saying, to the Iraqis, it is your turn; we will help you; step out and get the politics resolved.

So in line with demanding more from the Iraqis, General Petraeus, you are asking us for millions more to pay off the militias. And by the way, I have an article here that says that al-Maliki recently told a London-based paper that he was concerned about half of them and would not put them into the militia, into the ISF, because he thinks, and this is a quote from him, that they "oppose the central government."

But that aside, we've been paying 182 million (dollars) a year. That's on an annualized basis -- 18 million (dollars) a month. And I would say to you here at home we could get health care for 200 -- for 123,000 kids. We could send 210,000 kids to after-school programs for that money.

My question is, why don't you ask the Iraqis to pay the entire cost of that program? I think in Senator Lugar's testimony he made the point it could be an opportunity for them to then turn it into something more long-term.

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But when that supplemental comes, I'm going to be saying to my colleagues we should not be paying off those militia. And I wonder why, given the fact that the Iraqis have billions of dollars in surpluses, including 30 billion (dollars) in America, and we have nothing but raging deficits -- one reason is this war -- why we wouldn't ask them to pay for the cost of that program of paying off the militias.

GEN. PETRAEUS: First of all, Senator, these are not actually militias. What they are is typically tribal members, in some cases former insurgents. But this is how you end these wars. You sit down with former insurgents --

SEN. BOXER: I didn't say I objected to it. I asked you why they can't pay for it. I understand your point on it --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, in fact, Senator, what they are doing is they have committed 163 million (dollars) to gradually assume their contracts. They have committed the 300 million (dollars) that I mentioned in my statement to Iraqi CERP that offsets in fact what we are spending --

SEN. BOXER: Okay. I just -- I don't want to argue a point --

GEN. PETRAEUS: And beyond that, the savings in vehicles not lost actually is certainly worth it.

SEN. BOXER: Yeah. General, I understand your point. I'm just asking you why you would object to asking them to pay for that entire program --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well --

SEN. BOXER: -- given all we are giving them, in blood and everything else.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Senator, it is a very fair question, and I think that if there's anything that the ambassador and I will take back to Iraq, candidly, after this morning's session and the -- this afternoon's, is in fact to ask those kinds of questions more directly.

SEN. BOXER: Good. Excellent. We're very happy about that.

When the Bush administration told the American people more than five years ago that we'd be greeted as liberators in Iraq, and supporters of the war said that people would be dancing in the streets, waving American flags, there was a whole other vision put forward. And now last month Iranian President Ahmadinejad was given the red carpet treatment while our president has to sneak in there in the dead of night.

So I'm wondering: Why is it --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Red carpet ?).

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SEN. BOXER: -- why is it, after all we have given -- 4,024 American lives, gone; more than a half a billion (sic) dollars spent; all this for the Iraqi people -- but it's the Iranian president who is greeted with kisses and flowers?

And I'm quoting to you from an article in the Boston Globe.

Suzanne Maloney, an expert on the Middle East, argues that, quote, "Iraqi leaders will only begin to differentiate themselves from Teheran when they're forced to grapple independently with the painful alternatives of governing and assuming greater responsibility for their country's security. And that will only happen when we put a time frame on our presence."

So if either of you could answer this question: Do you agree that after all we have done, after all the sacrifices -- and God bless all of our troops and all of you who put yourselves in harm's way -- after all this, that Iran is stronger and more influential in Iraq than ever before?

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, that's a -- it's an important and complex issue, obviously. With respect to President Ahmadinejad's visit, I just make the point that presumably when he comes to Iraq, he doesn't have to worry about Iranian-backed extremist militias. More broadly --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

SEN. BIDEN: (Sounds gavel.) The committee will stand in recess and the police clear the people who are talking back there. (Pause.) Would you guys like a break after this? (Off-mike response.)

(Brief recess.)

SEN. BIDEN: The committee will resume.

Senator Boxer.

SEN. BOXER: If I could say, I agree with you that there are certain factions there that certainly support Iran. That's part of the problem. But my question is this. Ahmadinejad was the first national leader --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

SEN. BOXER: Can you please cool it back there?

Ahmadinejad was the first national leader to be given a state reception by Iraq's government. Iraq President Talabani and Ahmadinejad held hands as they inspected a guard of honor while a brass band played brisk British marching tunes. Children presented

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the Iranian with flowers. Members of Iraq's Cabinet lined up to greet him, some kissing him on both cheeks. So it's not a question about the militias out there. I'm saying, after all we have done, the Iraqi government kisses the Iranian leader! And our president has to sneak into the country. I don't understand it. Isn't it true that after all we've done, Iran has gained ground?

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, Iran and Iranian influence in Iraq is obviously an extremely important issue for us, but it's very much, I think, a mixed bag. And what we saw over these last couple of weeks in Baghdad and in Basra, as the prime minister engaged extremist militias that were supported by Iran. is that it revealed not only what Iran is doing in Iraq, but it produced a backlash against them and a rallying of support for the prime minister in being ready to take them on. Iran by no means has it all its own way in Iraq. Iraqis remember with clarity and bitterness the 1980 to '88 Iran-Iraq war.

SEN. BOXER: Yes. Well, that's my point.

AMB. CROCKER: In which --

SEN. BOXER: And now he's getting kissed on the cheek. That's my point.

AMB. CROCKER: And there was a lot of commentary around among Iraqis, including among Shi'a Iraqis, about just that point; what's he doing here after what they did to us during that war?

But Iraqi Shi'a died by the tens, by the hundreds of thousands defending their Arab and Iraqi identity and state against a Persian enemy, and that's, again, deeply felt. It means when Iran's hand is exposed in backing these extremist militias that there is backlash, broadly speaking, in the country, including from Iraq's Shi'a. And I think that's important, and I think it's important that the Iraqi government build on it.

SEN. BOXER: I give up. It is what it is. They kissed him on the cheek. I mean, what they say over the dinner table is one thing, but actually kissed him on the cheek. He got a red carpet treatment and we are losing our sons and daughters every single day for the Iraqis to be free. It is irritating is my point.

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, the vice president was in Iraq just a couple of weeks after that, and he also had a very warm reception.

SEN. BIDEN: Did he get kissed?

AMB. CROCKER: I believe -- (laughter) -- he did get kissed.

SEN. BIDEN: I want to know whether he got kissed. That's all. (Laughter.)

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Senator Voinovich?

Thank you, Senator Boxer.

SEN. GEORGE VOINOVICH (R-OH): First of all, I want to thank both of you for the terrific partnership that you've established in Iraq.

And a lot of us pray to the Holy Spirit -- have been praying to the Holy Spirit that somehow you would be enlightened and make the right decisions there, that the leaders in Iraq would be enlightened to understand this wonderful opportunity that we have given them, this great sacrifice of our -- over 4,000 troops lost, 28,000 coming home, half of them are going to be disabled the rest of their lives. And it's been -- I know when I talked Zal Khalilzad, he said, they're going to probably have to kill each other a little bit over there to realize that something's going to have to be different here, because they're destroying lives, infrastructure. And I -- it's heartening to see the awakening. When I visited even in August, the Sunnis knowing that we're not occupiers, that they don't like al Qaeda, that they like our PRTs and they like being paid, too. And then the Sons of Iraq now that are coming forward.

But I have to say to you, if you look at the enormous costs that we have incurred and will incur -- I mean, I've got the CBO numbers; they say it could be between \$1 trillion and \$1.7 trillion if we gradually withdraw over this period of time. And of course, all of the health care and the rest of it that's connected with it -- I think you all know that Government Accountability Office said that it would be 12 (billion dollars) to 13 billion (dollars) per year to replace the lost, damaged and worn equipment for the duration of the war in Iraq. The Marine Corps estimated it will 15.6 billion to reset its equipment. The National Guard said that they're going to need \$22 billion.

In other words, we're really at a point right now we're really strained and stressed out. In addition to that, we have a national debt that's \$9 trillion. This budget's going to be out of balance by another \$660 billion, and I hate to agree with Senator Feingold, but -- (laughter) -- I think that Osama bin Laden's sitting back right looking at this

We are doing -- we're giving -- we're eating our seed corn. We've got some really big problems today. And we're all -- we're in a recession and God only knows how long we're going to be in it. So it seems to me that there's some urgency that we need to pray a little bit harder to get them to understand that we're going to be on our way out.

And some of us have talked about this and what we think we need to have is a surge of diplomacy during this period of time. The witnesses that were in last week to tell us -- said that we should take advantage of this 10-month period between this administration going out and the next one coming in.

And if we don't -- if we don't do it in terms of diplomacy, if we

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don't sit down with the Syrians and the Saudis and the Egyptians and tell them, "Hey, guys, we're on our way out. We have to leave here because of our own financial situation and we're stressed out to the point where we've got to do this. Now, understand this -- and it's not in your best interest to see the thing blow up. It's time for you to step in and start taking some action in bringing people together."

And I also believe that in terms of this administration -- we've got lots of problems around the world, but I just finished a book by a kid named Miller about the much-too-promised land that talked about where we really made some difference, and that was when we got somebody in our government involved in a full-time basis. Condoleezza Rice should get together with you guys and she should work day in and day out to let them know, "Folks, we're on our way out."

And I just wonder -- do you understand that, that that's where we're at? We have somebody sitting across the table here who may be the next president of the United States. And the American people have had it up to here. And they -- you know, we appreciate the sacrifice that you've made and your families have made. Lives have changed forever. But the truth of the matter is -- and I'm sure your guys and women understand it -- do you know something? We haven't sacrificed one darn bit in this war. Not one. Never been asked to pay for a dime, except for the people that we lost. And I'd like to know what do you think about the idea of really coming up with a surge during this next 10 months, let them know -- you know, it's going to be over here, folks, and you'd better get at it.

AMB. CROCKER: Well, Senator -- look, I appreciate the -- you know, the sense of frustration that you articulate. I share it. I kind of live it every day. I mean, the reality is it is hard in Iraq and there are no light switches to throw that are going to go dark to light. It's going to be --

SEN. VOINOVICH: But don't you think if we said, "Folks, you know we're going to leave," they -- we hear that, but we are going to leave.

AMB. CROCKER: Well, first, with respect to the region, we have been sending that message. And that's why my testimony was written the way it was. We do need to see the region, particularly the Arabs, step forward. That's a message that's been sent by the president and the vice president during their visits to the region over the last couple of months. They do need to understand that they have an interest here and that staying disengaged is dangerous for Iraq, it's dangerous for the world and it's dangerous for the Arab world in particular.

Now, again, with respect to the frustration you articulate, if -- and these are not decisions we make. These are decisions that you will make, as well as others. If you decide, as I said in my testimony -- if we decide that we just don't want to do this anymore, then we certainly owe ourselves a very serious discussion of "then what." What are the consequences, because my experience in the Middle

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East, which goes back a lot longer than I care to remember, frankly, are that things can get really, really bad indeed. So we've got to have -- we've got to have a pretty sober discussion as to what the consequences of alternative courses of action are.

SEN. VOINOVICH: General?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I would echo what the ambassador said, sir. I certainly share the frustration. I've been at this I think about as long as anybody in uniform in Iraq. There may be some more out there longer, but not many. And again, it is very easy to dislike where we are, to be frustrated at it, and so forth, but we are where we are. And again, as the ambassador, I think, has very clearly stated, there are very, very real consequences of the different options that we consider.

And I think as long as it's very clear that we address those and we go into those with our eyes wide open, then that is -- the job has been done.

There has been pretty extensive diplomatic activity. Even the ambassador and I have participated in this. I've gone to Jordan. He's gone to a number of different Arab countries. We've both been to Bahrain, to Qatar and others. We may stop on the way back in a country as well. We -- certainly anything that generates that kind of supportive activity is welcome on the military side. So --

SEN. VOINOVICH: I just want to say -- once again, my time is up -- I was in Egypt and spent time with their foreign minister, I was in Jordan talking to their prime minister, and they don't have the urgency that they've got to really get involved today. And I think it is because they know that we're going to continue to be there for a while, and they really haven't faced the reality of -- that we one day are going to leave, and they better get at it.

SEN. BIDEN: I thank the senator from Ohio, and I wish he would not reference the senator from Illinois and cause anyone to cheer. I can only imagine the headline in The Washington Post: "Biden throws out people for cheering for Democratic candidate." (Laughter.) So I hope you'll refrain from referencing that again.

I yield to -- (chuckles) -- the senator from Florida.

SEN. BILL NELSON (D-FL): Mr. Chairman, before I continue my questioning from this morning in the Senate Armed Services Committee, I want to let Senator Obama go first, because he's got a scheduling problem. So with your permission --

SEN. BIDEN: I'll just imagine that headline, as a supporter for Hillary. I -- Senator, I think it's a good idea. (Laughter.)

No, Senator Obama, and then we'll go --

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SEN. BIDEN: -- we'll go back to Republican and then back to you.

Senator Obama.

SEN. BARACK OBAMA (D-IL): Well, first of all, thanks to Senator Nelson for his graciousness. And I want to thank both General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker for their dedication and sacrifice.

And obviously our troops are bearing the largest burden for this enterprise. I think all of -- both of you take those sacrifices very seriously, and we appreciate the sacrifices that you yourselves are making.

I want to just start off with a couple of quick questions, because in the parade of horrors that I think both of you have outlined, should we leave too quickly, at the center is al Qaeda in Iraq, and Iran. So I want to just focus on those two things for a moment.

With respect to al Qaeda in Iraq, it's already been noted they were not there before we went in, but they certainly were there last year, and they continue to have a presence there now.

Should we be successful in Mosul, should you continue, General, with the effective operations that you've been engaged in, assuming that in that narrow military effort we are successful, do we anticipate that there ever comes a time where al Qaeda in Iraq could not reconstitute itself?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think the question, Senator, is whether Iraqi security forces over time, with much less help, could deal with their efforts to reconstitute. I think it's --

SEN. OBAMA: That's my point.

GEN. PETRAEUS: I think it's a given that al Qaeda Iraq will try to reconstitute, just as any movement of that type does try to reconstitute. And the question is whether --

SEN. OBAMA: I don't mean to interrupt you but I just want to sharpen the question so that -- because I think you're getting right at my point here.

I mean, if one of our criteria for success is ensuring that al Qaeda does not have a base of operations in Iraq, I just want to harden, a little bit, the metrics by which we're measuring that. At what point do we say they cannot reconstitute themselves? Or are we saying that they're not going to be particularly effective, and the Iraqis themselves will be able to handle the situation?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I think it's really the latter, Senator, that again if you can keep chipping away at them, chipping away at their leadership, chipping away at the resources -- that comprehensive

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approach that I mentioned -- that over time, and we are reaching that in some other areas already.

As I mentioned, we are drawing down very substantially in Anbar province, a place that I think few people would have thought we'd be at the situation we're in at this point now, say, 18 months ago. And again that's what we want to try to achieve in all of the different areas in which al Qaeda still has a presence.

SEN. OBAMA: Okay. So I just want to be clear if I'm understanding.

We don't anticipate that there's never going to be some individual or group of individuals in Iraq that might have sympathies towards al Qaeda. Our goal is not to hunt down and eliminate every single trace but rather to create a manageable situation where they're not posing a threat to Iraq or using it as a base to launch attacks outside of Iraq.

Is that accurate?

GEN. PETRAEUS: That is exactly right.

SEN. OBAMA: Okay.

And it's also fair to say that, in terms of our success dealing with al Qaeda, that the Sunni Awakening has been very important, as you've testified. The Sons of Iraq and other tribal groups have allied themselves with us. There have been talks about integrating them into the central government.

However it's been somewhat slow, somewhat frustrating. And my understanding at least is although there's been a promise of 20 to 30 percent of them being integrated into the Iraqi security forces, that has not yet been achieved. On the other hand, the Maliki government was very quick to say, we're going to take another 10,000 Shi'as into the Iraqi security forces.

And I'm wondering, does that undermine confidence on the part of the Sunni tribal leaders, that they are actually going to be treated fairly and they will be able to incorporate some of these young men of military age into the Iraqi security forces?

GEN. PETRAEUS: No. That is ongoing, Senator.

As I mentioned, there's well over 20,000 who have already been integrated into either Iraqi security forces or other government positions. It doesn't just have to be the ISF. It could be other positions.

And there are thousands of others who are working their way through a process with the Iraqi national committee for reconciliation in the ministry of interior and so forth.

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It hasn't been easy, because in the beginning, certainly there was understandable suspicion about groups that were predominately Sunni -- although about 20 percent are actually Shi'a as well. But the process is moving. It's not been easy, but it is actually ongoing, and it is generally now a relatively routine process, although it takes lots of nudging.

SEN. OBAMA: Okay. Let me shift to Iran. Just as -- and Ambassador Crocker, if you want to address this, you can -- just as it's fair to say that we're not going to completely eliminate all traces of al Qaeda in Iraq but we want to create a manageable situation, it's also true to say that we're not going to eliminate all influence of Iran in Iraq, correct? That's not goal. That's can't be our definition of success, that Iran has no influence in Iraq, so can you define more sharply what you think would be a legitimate or fair set of circumstances in the relationship between Iran and Iraq that would make us feel comfortable drawing down our troops?

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, as I said in my statement, we have no problem with a good, constructive relationship between Iran and Iraq. The problem is with the Iranian strategy of backing extremist militia groups and sending in weapons and munitions that are used against Iraqis and against our own forces.

SEN. OBAMA: So do we feel -- do we feel confident that the Iraqi (sic) government is directing these -- this aid to these special groups, do we feel confident about that, or do we think that they're just tacitly tolerating it? Do you have some sense of that?

AMB. CROCKER: There's no question in our minds that the Iranian government, in particular, the Qods Force is -- this is a conscious, carefully worked out policy.

SEN. OBAMA: If that's the case, can you respond a little more fully to Senator Boxer's point? If, in fact, it is known, and I'm assuming you've shared this information with the Maliki government, that Iran's government has assisted in arming special groups that are doing harm to Iraqi security forces and undermining the Iraqi government, why is it that they are being welcomed the way they were?

AMB. CROCKER: Well, we don't need to, again, tell the prime minister that. He knows it --

SEN. OBAMA: Okay.

AMB. CROCKER: -- and is trying to take some steps to tighten up significantly on the border. In terms of the Ahmadinejad visit, you know, Iran and Iraq are neighbors. A visit like that should be in the category of a normal relationship.

SEN. OBAMA: Okay.

AMB. CROCKER: I think what we have seen since then in terms of this very clear spotlight focused on a malign Iranian influence puts

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that visit into a very different perspective for most Iraqis, including Iraqi Shi'a.

SEN. OBAMA: Okay. Mr. Chairman, I know that I'm out of time, so let me just -- if I could have the indulgence of the committee for one minute.

SEN. BIDEN: Everybody else has. (Laughter.)

SEN. OBAMA: Thank you.

I just want to close with a couple of key points. Number one, we all have the greatest in seeing a successful resolution to Iraq -- all of us do. And that, I think, has to be stated clearly in the record. I continue to believe that the original decision to go into Iraq was a massive strategic blunder, that the two problems that you've pointed out, al Qaeda in Iraq and increased Iranian influence in the region are a direct result of that original decision. That's not a decision you gentlemen made; I won't lay it at your feet. You are cleaning up the mess afterwards. But I think it is important as we debate this forward.

I also think that the surge has reduced violence and provided breathing room -- but that breathing room has not been taken the way we would all like it to be taken. And I think what happened in Basra is an example of Shi'a versus Shi'a jockeying for power that underscores how complicated the political situation is there and how we still have to continue to work vigorously to resolve it.

I believe that we are more likely to resolve it, in your own words, Ambassador, if we are applying increased pressure in a measured way. I think that increased pressure in a measured way, in my mind -- and this is where we disagree -- includes a timetable for withdrawal -- nobody's asking for a precipitous withdrawal, but I do think that is has to be a measured but increased pressure -- and a diplomatic surge that includes Iran because if Maliki can tolerate as normal neighbor-to-neighbor relations in Iran, then we should be talking to them as well. I do not believe we're going to be able to stabilize the situation without them.

Just the last point I will make: Our resources are finite. And this has been made -- this is a point that just was made by Senator Voinovich. It's been made by Senator Biden, Senator Lugar, Senator Hagel. There's a bipartisan consensus that we have finite resources. Our military is overstretched and the Pentagon has acknowledged it. Our -- the amount of money that we are spending is hemorrhaging our budget and al Qaeda in Afghanistan, I think, is feeling a lot more secure as long as we're focused in Iraq and not on Afghanistan.

When you have finite resources, you've got to define your goals tightly and modestly. And so my final -- and I'll even pose us a

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question and you -- I won't -- you don't necessarily have to answer, maybe it's a rhetorical question. If we were able to have the status quo in Iraq right now without U.S. troops, would that be a sufficient definition of success? It's obviously not perfect. There's still violence. There's still some traces of al Qaeda. Iran has influence, more than we would like. But if we had the current status quo, and yet our troops have been drawn down to 30,000, would we consider that a success? Would that meet our criteria? Or would that not be good enough and we have to -- we'd have to devote even more resources to it?

AMB. CROCKER: Senator, I can't imagine the current status quo being sustainable with that kind of precipitous drawdown.

I think --

SEN. BIDEN: That wasn't the question.

SEN. OBAMA: No, no, that wasn't the question. I'm not suggesting that we yank all our troops out all the way. I'm trying to get to an endpoint. That's what all of us have been trying to get to.

See, the problem I have is if the definition of success is so high -- no traces of al Qaeda and no possibility of reconstitution; a highly effective Iraqi government; a democratic, multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian, functioning democracy; no Iranian influence, at least not of the kind that we don't like -- then that portends the possibility of us staying for 20 or 30 years.

If on the other hand, our criteria is a messy, sloppy status quo, but there's not, you know, huge outbreaks of violence; there's still corruption, but the country's struggling along but it's not a threat to its neighbors and it's not an al Qaeda base; that seems, to me, an achievable goal within a measurable time frame.

And that, I think, is what everybody here on this committee has been trying to drive at. And we haven't been able to get as clear of an answer as we would like.

AMB. CROCKER: And that's because, Senator, it is a, I mean, don't like to sound like a broken record.

SEN. OBAMA: I understand.

AMB. CROCKER: But this is hard and this is complicated.

I think that when Iraq gets to the point that it can carry forward its further development without a major commitment of U.S. forces, with still a lot of problems out there, but where they and we would have a fair certitude that again they can drive it forward themselves without significant danger of having the whole thing slip away from them again, then clearly our profile, our presence, diminishes markedly.

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But that's not where we are now.

SEN. OBAMA: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you.

On the second round, we'll go back and ask you to answer the question you were asked, which you haven't answered. But we'll do that in the second round.

Senator Murkowski.

SEN. LISA MURKOWSKI (R-AK): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And gentlemen, thank you for your service. Certainly thank you for your endurance here this afternoon. Certainly a marathon day for you. But truly thank you for all that you do to serve so many in this country.

When you were here before the committee last, in September, we were talking, at that point in time, the focus was on the military surge and a great deal of discussion as to how that was going to play out and what we could anticipate and what we could expect. I asked the question of both of you at that time more along the lines of, let's talk about the civilian surge. What are we doing on the other side that can help facilitate the military mission, the military surge?

And at that time, General, you responded that you would like to see more from the civilian side.

You indicated at that time that there were some elements of the government that truly were at war. The Department of Defense clearly was engaged. The Department of State was engaged, AID, but not all the others. And there were some departments that you specifically mentioned at that time.

From your standpoint at this point in time, now, are you satisfied that we have that level of participation from those other departments, from those other areas of government where we can and should be making a difference?

Now, Ambassador Crocker, in your testimony, you go into some length about what we are seeing with the PRTs and the efforts that have been made there. But I'll just repeat the question from September to both of you, again, as to whether or not you're satisfied that all areas that need to be engaged are fully engaged.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, Senator, there has been a surge on the civilian side that has been very helpful, frankly. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the so-called EPRTs, the Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are actually sub-provincial in most cases, have been enormously helpful and valuable. They have augmented at brigade headquarters, division headquarters the assets of our civilian

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affairs -- civil affairs personnel and brought real -- really useful skill sets to bear in a number of different provinces and districts. And that has been of enormous value and enormous help.

There's also been an increase in certain areas in the capacity building arena. And again, that has helped, as has been the organization of what we call fusion cells, where the -- as you may know, I've reported before that the Multinational Force Iraq and the embassy actually have a joint campaign plan. This truly is one team. And we head it together in that regard. Yes, we report to different chains of command, but we try to achieve unity of effort in what we do. And so we've actually combined our assets in areas such as the energy fusion cell, which looks at oil and electricity.

There is a voter security -- there -- it just goes on and on -- a number of these different fusion cells.

Having said all that, there still is a need for capacity building help in certain areas. And I think -- I'm sure the ambassador would agree that there are certain ministries in Iraq that still could use help in the capacity-building arena and still probably don't have all that they should have.

Beyond that, I think we do need to take a look at the PRT composition. And that is ongoing, actually, just to report out that that is taking place, to determine, for example, do you need more agriculture experts in Nineveh than you do in Baghdad? Do you need more oil experts in, say, Kirkuk, than you need in -- right now, at least, in Anbar, although there's oil out there, too.

So that is what is ongoing. And again, bottom line is, there's been a substantial civilian surge in the PRT arena and in some capacity-building areas, but there is still more needed in others.

SEN. MURKOWSKI: Ambassador, when you address this, in your comments to the committee, you've indicated that the era of U.S.-funded major infrastructure projects is over. So that when we're talking about the assistance that is being provided from here on out in Iraq, it is more of the -- when you say the capacity-building, those experts that can come in to help facilitate.

Because I think that the concern that you have certainly heard around this dais today is the American patience is not unlimited. The president has said that. You have indicated that. Our support, our financial support equally cannot be unlimited. And when Iraq is at that point, as they are now, where they clearly have reserves that are available to them, I think the American public looks at this and says, okay, well, we can understand the need to continue funding that equipment for our troops. We appreciate that. But when it comes to the building of the school or the building of the hospital, I've got schools and hospitals in my community that need to be addressed. So can you speak to that aspect of the U.S. investment into Iraq at this point?

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AMB. CROCKER: That's an important point, Senator, and that is exactly right. I mean, our emphasis has shifted away from infrastructure. We're not doing schools and clinics anymore and into capacity-building, as we've discussed, but also developing local capacity. That's, again, where the PRTs come in with their quick response funds, to be able to do things that local governments cannot do for themselves, and are, as of yet, unable to resource through higher echelons of government. And also to pay attention categories of people that -- or circumstances that, again, may not get the assistance they need from other sources at this point -- NGOs, women's groups, we do a lot there and so forth.

I, broadly speaking, would say that what is motivating our thinking now is kind of this traditional construct of foreign aid, of using it where it makes a difference in ways that are important to us and where it wouldn't happen if we weren't able to step forward.

SEN. MURKOWSKI: Can I just ask very, very quickly, Mr. Chairman, and this is to you, General -- as we approach July and this 45-day period of consolidation and evaluation -- you know, we've also been talking with the Pentagon about achieving that goal of reducing the deployment rotations from the currently 15 months to the desired level of 12 months -- what will this do, if anything, to the length of deployments?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Senator, obviously, I'm not the one that determines the level of deployments, but I do -- have certainly heard newspaper articles, at least, say that there is discussion about this and there may be some mention of this in the days or weeks to come.

SEN. MURKOWSKI: But you don't think that your proposal --

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm fine with 12-month tours. I am fine with 12-month tours. I would -- we would welcome 12-month tours.

SEN. MURKOWSKI: And you think you can do it, given the numbers that you have currently, keeping them at 12-month deployments?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, again, we're not the force providers. We're obviously the force employers. And the ones who have to answer that, rightly, are the Department of the Army, Department of the Navy in the case of the Marine Corps. But again, my understanding is there has been discussion of that. We've been asked, are we okay with 12-month tours? We have replied that that is fine. And again --

SEN. MURKOWSKI: I think that's where we all would like to get.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I -- again, that's obviously for other people to determine.

SEN. MURKOWSKI: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much. Let me explain to my colleagues, I appreciate your patience in my allowing people to go --

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if they're in the midst of a question -- beyond the seven minutes. As one of my colleagues from New Jersey recently said, he said he appreciates my patience. He'll learn to appreciate it more the more senior he is. (Laughs.) But I do appreciate all of you. I know it's a long, long wait, and -- but I don't want to cut people off in the midst of them finishing up.

Senator Nelson.

SEN. BILL NELSON (D-FL): Gentlemen, I want to continue to follow-up on my questioning this morning. And I had quoted from two retired generals that had testified to us last week. And General Odom -- let me state another quote of his: "Let me emphasize that our new Sunni friends insist on being paid for their loyalty. I've heard, for example, the cost in one area of about 100 square kilometers is \$250,000 per day. And periodically they threaten to defect unless their fees are increased. And many who break with al Qaeda and join our forces are beholden to no one, thus the decline in violence reflects a dispersion of power to dozens of local strongmen." End of quote from General Odom.

So are these figures accurate? Are we paying these Sunnis up to \$250,000 in a hundred square mile -- square kilometer area?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm not familiar with that particular statistic, Senator. Again, I did present the figure that we provide per month in my briefing earlier. And as I mentioned, we think that this -- the math is very much in our favor, candidly, when we look at the savings and the vehicles that are not lost, not to mention, again, the priceless lives that are saved by the increased security.

The key over time -- and General Odom is exactly right, that over time these have to be integrated into, again, Iraqi governmental institutions, employment and so forth. And there's a variety of programs that are designed to facilitate that, including a number of those that I mentioned have been funded by the Iraqi government in terms of the retraining and the integration programs as well as the -- and Iraqi security force integration efforts.

SEN. BILL NELSON: Well, it's not necessarily bad that we're paying them. We pay in a lot of areas, including for intelligence. But General Odom's point was, and I'll quote him again, "We don't own them; we merely rent them." And he was concerned that these groups don't have any allegiance to our U.S. forces. And so with this decline, what do you think about his comment about his comment about, quote, "the decline in violence reflect the dispersion of power to dozens of the local strongmen"?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, Senator, there has always been a tribal structure in a number of these areas, and what have done is come to realize that we should work with tribal sheikhs. They are important organizing elements in their society. They frankly do a lot more than just sheikh work; they also typically have a construction business, an import/export business and a trucking company. So they're very

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integrated into the economies as well.

Again, over time, what we have to do is provide avenues for their tribal members to find either slots in the Iraqi security forces and local police or what have you, or be integrated into the economy through job training, through these small loans that the Iraqis are providing, and so forth.

SEN. BILL NELSON: Well, in the context that I started my questioning today of the surge militarily has working -- worked, has it provided the environment in which we in fact can get the political reconciliation? Let me tell you what General McCaffrey, a retired four-star, testified to us. He says, "The war as it is now configured is not militarily nor politically sustainable." That's a quote. And he further says, "There is no U.S. political will to" continual casualties of military killed, of U.S. military killed and wounded every month.

You want to comment on General McCaffrey's comments?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, I think, again, we're keenly aware of, as I've mentioned a number of times, the enormous strain, the enormous sacrifice and the enormous cost of the effort in Iraq. And it was factored into my recommendations, and it is a reason that the surge, for example, is going to come to an end, and it's a reason that that we will look as hard as we can to make farther reductions once the dust is settled after we've taken one-quarter -- over one-quarter of our combat power out over about a seven- or eight-month period.

SEN. BILL NELSON: Mr. Ambassador, I want to ask you also what General McCafferty (sic) felt very strongly. He said that the only thing that could keep Iraq united -- at the end of the day, once we start pulling out, he says either you have the strong security commitment by the United States or a strongman emerges. And that begs the question from General McCaffrey's comments: Are we facing a situation where we've removed a dictator and is another one likely to replace him?

AMB. CROCKER: I don't think that is what any segment of the Iraqi population wants to see. Iraqis know about dictators. They suffered under one of the worst in the world, and they also suffered not quite as severely but significantly from his predecessors from '58 on. So if there is a unifying view among Iraqis, it is that they do not want to go back to that.

At the same time, I think Iraqis from all communities see the value -- not just the value, but the necessity of maintaining an Iraqi identity, and that includes the Kurds. I think the recent events with the PKK and the Turks have demonstrated to the Kurds the value of being part of a larger Iraqi entity. So, you know, I'm familiar with the thinking on the strong man theory, but I don't think that is where anyone in Iraq wants to take this.

And finally I'd make the point on another piece of glue that

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holds the country together, and those are revenues, oil revenues. While it is true that they have not yet wrestled their way through to a comprehensive hydrocarbon and revenue-sharing package, revenues are distributed, and they -- all the provinces and all the communities obviously have an interest in having that happen, and it goes through the center. So I think that's also a powerful force that holds Iraq together.

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very much.

Senator?

SEN. JOHNNY ISAKSON (R-GA): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Petraeus, thank you for your service to the country, and the same to you, Ambassador Crocker.

General Petraeus, I want to acknowledge that naval officer Maria Miller, who's leaving the room, accompanied you here from Baghdad, and I just want to brag about her for a second as an example of the brave men and women that are representing us. She worked in the House of Representatives on the Education Committee, post 9/11 volunteered to go to OCS the United States Navy and came to Iraq to be your administrative assistant, and that's just one example of countless tens of thousands of American young people who are doing a magnificent job. So I commend you on her selection and her on her selection of you.

Let me ask, Ambassador Crocker, when I voted for the surge last year, I did so clearly in the anticipation that it gave us a chance to both buy time and the opportunity for there to be some political action and political movement on behalf of the Iraqis. I -- you made a comment during your remarks about Basra, about Maliki actually deploying Shi'a troops against a Shi'a militia to regain control, and although there was a lot of comments about that being a deterioration, it seemed to me to send a signal that they were willing to lead. Am I right there?

AMB. CROCKER: You are right, Senator. This was an initiative he took on himself, and politically it's had very positive resonance throughout Iraq.

SEN. ISAKSON: Well, if you combine that with the fact that they've established elections for before October of this year -- provincial elections -- I think I remember right about the Iraqi constitution, if you -- if you are a political party and operate a militia, you can't gain voting status or electable status. Is that right?

AMB. CROCKER: That is -- that is correct, and that is what the prime minister said publicly I think yesterday or the day before.

SEN. ISAKSON: So I think it's important for us to understand we have an opportunity, or they have an opportunity, with Maliki having

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demonstrated he's willing to deploy Shi'a troops to enforce security as he did in Basra and at the port. And if they can't gain political power if they're operating a militia, that possibly these elections in the provinces this fall could be more about politics and less about militias. Am I right?

AMB. CROCKER: I think you are right, Senator. These elections will be important because -- indeed, critical -- because, you know, that is how this contest for power and influence gets sorted out by nonviolent means. It's how the Sunnis regain representation. It's how the contest among Shi'a gets resolved -- again, by means other than violence. So these are very important.

SEN. ISAKSON: Well, the Sunnis are going to turn out this time, right?

AMB. CROCKER: Absolutely. They've made that very clear, that boycotting didn't work for them and they're not going to do it again.

SEN. ISAKSON: And if Muqtada al-Sadr and some of the other Shi'a who operate militias understand to be a part of the political process, you can't have a militia, you got to be a part of the election, we have the chance to at least get these parties to the same table politically. Is that correct?

AMB. CROCKER: I think we do, and I think we're seeing some signs of that debate within the Sadr trend. That may have been what motivated him to issue the statement he did in late March, saying put the guns down, guys, that this was not working to his political advantage.

SEN. ISAKSON: Well, it's my hope that as you do the consolidation and review that takes place in that six weeks post-July, that there is continuing political movement on behalf of the Iraqis, and then you really do begin to see a political resolution to the problem that we all know ultimately must come. And that's what I think we've got to hope and actually work for.

General Petraeus, your comment about a unit that had just enjoyed meeting its entire goal for reenlistment in the first quarter of this year, I think that's the 3rd ID --

GEN. PETRAEUS: It is, Senator.

SEN. ISAKSON: -- out of Fort Stewart, Georgia. And I was there last week when the first of those men and women came back, and I -- when you get the chance, Fort Stewart, in dealing with this stress on the force and the pressure on the force, the orthopedic injuries that are becoming more common and PTSD and traumatic brain, the Army has installed a tremendous warrior transition facility at Fort Stewart, which I visited with the 71 soldiers who were in there, and it's remarkable to me what they have done to deal with the typical Iraqi injury, both soft-tissue as well as non. It's just fantastic, and I hope if you ever get the chance -- you're a busy man -- you'll get to

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visit there, because it is truly an impressive facility.

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Initial Transcript

IRAQ AFTER THE SURGE: WHAT NEXT?

SUBJECT: GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ; AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

LOCATION: HEARING OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE



HEARING OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: IRAQ AFTER THE SURGE: WHAT NEXT?

CHAired BY: SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN (D-DE)

WITNESSES: GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ; AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

LOCATION: 216 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 2:37 P.M. EDT

DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2008

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GEN. PETRAEUS: Sir, I've also visited the facility at Walter Reed, which is state of the art as well, and in fact will see soldiers from there on Friday.

SEN. ISAKSON: My last comment is -- I have really two last comments.

One is about what Senator Murkowski and some others have said. The costs of this war has been tremendous on the taxpayers of the United States, and it appears to me for the first time the Iraqis -- the government is really making some steps to take over a significant part. I know they're budgeting more than they're actually deploying, and I know that's -- and that's going to be the root of my question.

If I look in here, they budgeted \$10.1 billion for capital spending but only deployed 4.7 (billion dollars) in 2007. Are they getting better at deploying the resources they have to replace what we as Americans were paying for?

AMB. CROCKER: They are getting better, Senator. Overall, budget execution for 2007 is going to come in at something like 62, 63 percent -- obviously not what it needs to be, but that's almost three times better than they did in 2006. So they are getting increasingly skillful at being able to not only design, but then execute their budgets.

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Equally truthfully, they've got to -- we've got some ways to go, and that's why we're making a major effort at improving their budget execution efforts. We've got -- if we can get the de-ob/re-ob (ph) through, we'll have another -- for some old reconstruction money, we intend to bring out a dozen Department of Treasury folks to work specifically on this issue.

SEN. ISAKSON: I'll ask a question. It'll be more of a "ask General Petraeus to comment."

Our chairman was probably the leader in the Senate on the effort to develop -- appropriate the money for the MRAP. When I was there in January, I got to actually ride in one with a squad that went into Ghazalia. And I've read -- tried to keep up with the results -- the amazing results of the MRAP. Can you give us an update? It's been three months since I was there. Is it still performing and protecting lives like it --

GEN. PETRAEUS: It very much is, Senator. I don't have a count of the lives it has saved, but I can assure you that it is certainly in the dozens. It has performed magnificently. And I don't want to, in an unclass get into the eachees of all this stuff, but what it provides in terms of additional protection for our soldiers is very, very substantial. And I think I -- I thanked the earlier committee, I guess, today, about the MRAP because of just the sheer speed of providing that to us has been breathtaking as well. I mean, it's almost been like a Manhattan Project to get these V-shaped hulls out there for us. And that MRAP family of vehicles has been exceptional.

SEN. ISAKSON: Well, thanks to both of you for your service and commitment.

AMB. CROCKER: Thank you, Senator.

SEN. BIDEN: I'll say to the senator I have done a study on just that question, and I'll be happy to put it in the record and make it available to you, at least from one senator's perspective, working with the Pentagon on that.

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(END OF TODAY'S COVERAGE. COVERAGE WILL RESUME TOMORROW.)

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